

Sam explains the journey of freedom and the psychological inquiry that has been integral to her growth and learning at Insight Yoga Institute for the last 11 years with her teacher Sarah Powers. Sam highlights the importance of always learning, growing and evolving.

Amanda: Hello. I am Amanda Dzengeleski from Dogwood Studios and I have the pleasure of sitting down with my mentor friends and all around inspiration, to learn more about her influences and approaches to teaching yoga.

Sam doesn't need much of an introduction. She is the owner and lead teacher of dogwood studios. That would be a big enough accomplishment for a single person. But Sam is exceptional. Sam is a registered nurse, certified yoga therapist, experienced registered yoga instructor, and an insight yoga institute. Sam has many other certifications and trainings. For example, certified integrative yoga for seniors. Functional movement. Mindfulness, yoga for cancer. Vinyasa flow yoga and yin yoga. Sam is a fascia enthusiast related to movement therapy for improvements in posture. Chronic pain and prevention of injury. In addition, since 2002. Sam and her partner Chuck operate clinical pathways, a small clinical consulting firm that works with companies developing new therapies to treat disease through Western medicine. And let's not forget one of Sam's most influential accomplishments. Raising 2 delightful grown children, Rob and Sarah.

Thank you so much for being here and for sharing your vast knowledge with all of us.

Sam: Thanks Amanda.

Amanda: Let's start with the journey that brought you to your current status as a senior experience yoga and meditation teacher, a certified yoga therapist and now an Insight Yoga Institute endorsed teacher.

Sam: Thank you Amanda! I think my journey started as a registered nurse. In the 1980s, I moved down to North Carolina from Western New York after

graduating from nursing school. I began nursing adults patients in intensive care units and in community health. My background before nursing school was wellness. Then I started to combine the two. This approach to nursing, which is very holistic, and wellness which is very proactive.

As I'm pausing and thinking about it more, my journey started earlier. It started as a little girl around 2 years old when we moved in with my grandparents. I was raised by two seniors and my mom. And I think that really influenced my draw to working with seniors. So the wellness, the nursing work, living and being raised by seniors all came together.

Later on, in about 2008 I did my first yoga teacher training. I was practicing yoga with my wellness population but hadn't been formally trained. I just had practice yoga for many years. My first training was in vinyasa flow with Ashtanga Yoga. And then I was looking for more therapeutic practices and yoga, and I found Insight Yoga Institute (IYI) with Sarah Powers. In 2012 she was at the Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I remember the meditation that we had in January, looking out at the steel gray trees. It was amazing. And also, the idea of a quiet practice to help us have time to watch and learn about the interaction of mind, body and heart.

Then finally, promoting the functional movement of individuals has always been something that I integrate into my practice, whether with seniors or with any age individual. I became certified as a yoga therapist through the International Association of Yoga Therapists in their grandparenting program. So that's my journey. I opened Dogwood Studios. COVID happened and we closed the physical studio. But we never stopped. So that's where we are now.

I, like most people, find that adversity in our life brings us to other things that help us heal. And one of the things that helps me heal is mindfulness and working with the subtle body, energy body. And helping at least for my journey through life, is being a little kinder to myself.

Amanda: Well, congratulations on your most recent accomplishment. Getting endorsed by Insight Yoga Institute. What does it mean to be an Insight Yoga Institute endorsed teacher?

Sam: I think from my own journey being trained in yoga. There was something missing. So I started to look for trainings and teachers that would fill the other side of yoga, to yoke, on philosophical, especially, the part of yoga that helps us uncover our true essence. So I started to supplement that in and that was the work I started to do with Sarah Powers and the Insight Yoga Institute 11 or 12 years ago.

The, IYI or Insight Yoga Institute is a community that when you commit to practicing or joining the institute, you're committing to really working on cultivating a balance in your wellbeing - related to mindfulness and psychological inquiry of who we really are. You have to do a lot of self-work.

Freedom is to me is this mindful awareness that we are free. And we're most, we're most able to feel freedom when we are most in tune to our True Nature, who we are. So freedom to me is training up our ability to know our True Nature. And what helps support us to be feel free, not euphoric necessarily, but this time where we're free. We feel grounded. We feel calm, and more rested and when something big is thrown at us we still have those characteristics there. So freedom is building and training up our mindfulness that now and being mindful. Freedom is also the action of training up freedom, which is also when we're able to recognize when we are not free.

Yin Yoga is one of the tools of Insight Yoga. The goal of the [yin foundations] training is to help teachers and students take Yin Yoga and not feel like they have to be in the deepest, longest held pose. You can move any time you want to. You should prop. So teaching that, with skeletal variation in mind [and medical history], what we call the archetypes and variations to make the practice more accessible. My goal is to make it more accessible to folks.

Amanda: How would you say that you continue to interweave all of the practices that you do into a cohesive class?

Sam: I feel that the classes at Dogwood are a great representation of all of the components that came into my growth as a yoga practitioner: the mindfulness and the practices. The classes we teach at Dogwood, for example Mindful Movement and Yoga, definitely embody practices where we pay attention to the amount of time we are present in this present moment. We cultivate observing our interaction with our intellect and with our thoughts, our emotions, and our physical body. Not only a senior population, our community tends to be individuals that are looking for a practice that is healing and very adaptive to where they are and their needs, their mind, body and heart, and not being asked to practice in a certain way. That is how we practice at Dogwood and I think that really represents how all these practices come together.

Then there's the one-on-one sessions that I do as a yoga therapist. The goal with these sessions is to use this tool kit to help the individual uncover what are the best tools for them at this moment for improving their well-being: functionally, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and also in their energy body. So that is in a nutshell, how I (we) use all of these different components together. Sometimes I call this my yoga *stew* or *soup*. My ingredients to this recipe and the recipe is always changing that's for sure.

Amanda: Considering your experience and all of your certifications, it seems as though you really value professional development and lifelong learning. So to you, what does it mean to be a lifelong learner of yoga? And how do you embody lifelong learning of yoga into your daily life?

Sam: So one thing that I think my students notice is that I'm always learning. I'm always going to sit with my teachers and try to balance the western-eastern theories and techniques. One thing that I do often when I am taught something new is take pieces of it and see if it works within the

current makeup of how I'm working with clients and teaching classes. This is how I embody it. That's how I make it something that is not just theoretical but something we experience.

The latest thing that I am enjoying and hopefully students and teachers are also enjoying or learning and benefiting from, is this whole psychological inquiry of the parts of us that are with us day to day that we developed when we were very young that were developed mainly to protect us and how they interact in our adulthood. Sometimes they're very, very beneficial. They maybe drive us to achieve or to help people be safe. And sometimes, like when our balance is off, they get out of balance and we get out of balance with them. We become over reactive. They are overprotecting us, basically, they think like we're a little person again. So becoming aware of these parts that reveal themselves when we are calm can be very healing and help us in our journey through life. For example, when I practice Yin Yoga or other meditative practice where I am cultivating time to be in the present moment, and cultivating longer periods of calm.

In a calm state, we have the ability to be less reactive and at those moments are those gates where we can sit with those parts of us and realize they are not who we are. They are our helpers. They sit with us. They practice with us. So we don't become interwoven with them. And then we can use them to our benefit. And we also have this time of Freedom where we have the ability to observe our mind, body and heart instead of reacting to it. Think about the benefits of this to our physicality, our nervous system, it is so amazing. Our physical body, fascia and emotional health all benefit from these practices. That's why I'm drawn to a Yin practice. I integrate Yin into all my classes. Even in a very physical practice, like our Ageless Balance and Strength (ABS) class, I interweave Yin into it. I also interweave Yin in our quiet meditation classes.

To me, lifelong learning is helping me learn more about my true nature, my true being, which to me equates as Freedom. This time of being accepting of who I am and not overreacting. [This then helps others' wellbeing.]

Amanda: Why is it important to contemplate on freedom when you practice?

Sam: It is interesting that I use the word Freedom quite a bit. In my video submission for my endorsement, I was speaking of mindfulness as being a verb or a noun. We commonly think of mindfulness as being an action, the act of being in the present moment and doing activities that cultivate that.

But when you arrive in a mindful state, that is the noun. That is Freedom. This is the awareness that we are Free. This helps us learn who we really are. The goodness that we have. Our freedom. It gives us freedom to be less reactive to the parts of us that protected us as a youngster and maybe overreacting or overworking or maybe thinking you're still little. Freedom is this psychological inquiry of, "am I behaving because I'm reacting to my parts?"

For example, I have parts that tell me, "Be quieter. Be in the background. Don't be a leader. Be a good person. Be quiet. Don't make waves." And that's evolved into, [sometimes] "you're not good enough" This part of me is not in balance. If I react to it and listen to it, I become less confident. I become indecisive. I doubt that I can do things. Thus, taking 11 years to get through Insight Yoga Institute to endorsement. And that's ok. It takes a while to learn and befriend these parts. And to me it can only happen when we are in the state of mindfulness, the state of freedom.

So these practices that we do are these practices that help us train up to have longer moments of freedom, of mindfulness. You can do this in a meditation, in a Yin practice or in a [combo] physical functional movement practice. We blend all these into all our practices. That's why I like integration of Yin, where we pause longer but still stay strong. It is balance.

Amanda: How has your Insight Yoga Institute endorsements influenced the creation of your upcoming series, Therapeutic Yin Yoga for Any-Body Lunchtime Learning series on Wednesdays kicking off May 31st?

Sam: My endorsement, or the model for Insight Yoga Institute, has definitely influenced why I'm offering this Therapeutic Yin Yoga for Any-Body Lunchtime Learning coming up. The model has influenced a lot related to doing a practice that cultivates more time in a Mindful State. And then in a Yin Yoga practice we're also using the poses, in a healthy way, to stress certain fascia planes that are associated with the energy body or the subtle body. The balance of the subtle body and the physical body is a really beneficial practice for our wellbeing.

The third thing outside of IYI is my work with functional movement and making these [yin] poses available to Any Body. Teaching individuals how these fascia planes are linked to the subtle body and what meridians, the energy systems. Finally, we can take and adapt them [the poses] to you whether there is arthritis, high anxiety or whatever it might be in your body. This [yin foundations] course will give that to those that leave it and then you can apply it in your day-to-day for your lifelong learning whether it is in a class setting or on your own. My goal is that you walk away with your own archetype variation and understand how you are benefiting your energy system. And the benefit of cultivating longer periods of Freedom, Mindfulness.

Amanda: Thank you for being here and for sharing your story. I think I can speak for myself and the Dogwood community when I say that we appreciate your support and your inspiration and all of your lovely offerings.

Sam: Thank you. Thank you so much.